

MORAL TALES.

A Legend of the Rhine.

FROM THE GERMAN.

There where yon rocks are sleeping, beneath the bright moonshine,  
A Nymph her watch is keeping, and gazing on the Rhine.  
She looks upon the river, as the vessels glide along—  
She sings and gazes ever; but youth! beware her song.  
With eye, so softly beaming, thus doth she look on all,  
Whilst like clustering sun-beams streaming, her golden ringlets fall.  
But, like the inconstant water, those glances still have rolled—  
Beware the Flood!—the daughter, for the wave is false and cold!

Thus sang an old huntsman, who had seated himself on a rock which impended over the Rhine, not far from the cave where, in ancient times, the holy hermit, St. Goar, had taken up his abode, and effected the conversion of the neighbouring fishermen. The waves, as they rushed past, bore swiftly along with them a small slight bark, in which sat a youth clothed in costly apparel. The boat was just speeding to the dangerous whirlpool, called the Bank, where the steersman is driven to the exercise of his utmost skill, to retain any command over his vessel. Yet the youth heeded not the dangers of his situation, nor turned away his gaze from a dark frowning rock, from whence a fair but unearthly maiden looked down, and seemed to smile upon him. The old huntsman now sang louder and louder, for he could not help fancying that the poor youth had set out to visit his true-love, and had been bewitched by the sight of the water-fairy, Loreley. Lute, bow, and rudder, had all escaped from his hold; his hat, with its white plume, hung only by a ribbon around his neck, and he seemed to abandon himself to the rushing and raging waters, as though he delighted in their fury, and waited till they should have risen sufficiently high to bear him up the rock. The huntsman might have sung yet louder, and the whirlpool might have risen to overpower him with their roar, yet still not one single word would have reached the object of his warning; for he heard and saw nothing but the beautiful nymph, who, seated on the rock above him, was engaged in picking up little pieces of glittering stone, as though she were, gathering flowers, and anon, gaily scattering them in the water, and leaning over its sides to watch them sink down, and disappear in sparkling foam-bells. It seemed to her victim that it was to him she was leaning and smiling, and he stretched out his arms with a longing look; and stood as if gazing on a far-off star; when all at once his little bark was dashed with a shattering stroke on the sharp stones, and the vortex dragged him to its raging gulf, and closed its gigantic arms above his struggling form. All was now over with the hapless youth. He never rose again. But Loreley looked down with a careless and even sportive glance, gathered fresh splinters from the rock, and smiled like a child through her long fair hair.

It was now that the huntsman drew forth his horn, and blew a shrill blast, that brought his dogs howling to his feet, and with them attracted to the spot some fishermen, who were spreading their nets at a little distance off. But no aid could avail to rescue the devoted victim from the eddying waters.

"Did you see," asked the old man, as he stepped into the fisherman's boat, "how the sorceress rejoiced at the death of the poor youth, and how gladly she listened to the waves that engulfed him, and

foamed and hissed above his head, as though they were mocking his love and folly?" But a young fisher replied, "What had the maiden on the rock to do with it, if the rash boy chose to fix his eyes on her, instead of keeping them carefully on the current? It was not she who drove him towards the whirlpool, but he himself who was the cause of the catastrophe." They then went on to tell how the beautiful fairy would often appear to them, towards evening, close to the shore, and look so sweet and kind, and point out places for them to throw their nets, where they never failed to be enriched with a plentiful draught. "But if," continued the fisherman, "any one should offer to approach her, (as who would not, when she is so good and beautiful?) she grows angry, and disappears like a vapour. Whether she flies up to the clouds, or sinks down to the deep, is more than we can tell, and nobody knows who or what she really is."

The old huntsman shook his head, and went on his way towards Bacharach, through the darkening twilight. Not far from thence lay Stahleck, a castle inhabited by the Palatine of the Rhine. Many a tale had reached his court, about the wonderful maiden, who, from time to time, was wont to exhibit herself on the rock; but no one of the Palatine's household had ever seen her, and the Count would always repress their inquisitiveness, and tell them, that those from whom God was pleased to withhold the sight of such ministers of evil, ought to be thankful and contented, and not allow themselves to indulge in such idle and unprofitable curiosity.

The Palatine's son was a young and beautiful boy, so beautiful that it seemed as if the spring had sent him forth for its messenger, and as if life turned to spring wherever he looked and smiled. Often had he bent his longing eyes towards the spot which was the origin of these wonderful stories, and from whence only the commands of his parents restrained his eager steps; for they had themselves remarked, and had heard from his playmates and companions in the chase, how completely his mind and thoughts were occupied with the idea of the fair enchantress. All he had ever heard of her was treasured up carefully in his memory, and her image was constantly present to his imagination, arrayed in all its brightness and beauty. In fancy, he beheld her, lonely as she was, reclining on her wild rock, beneath the setting sun, or the pale moon, and warbling sweet music to the solitary Rhine.

On the evening already referred to, Hubert (such was the young Count's name) was sitting with his sister Una on a pleasant slope of the green mountain, called the Kuhlberg, just opposite the Voigtsberg, where the costliest grapes ripen in profusion beneath the genial sunshine. "There they had lingered, watching the boats gliding along the river, or the reflections in the water of many a well-known spot, now mirrored in joyous light, and now hidden in gloomy shadow. For some time they had conversed together, and talked over many a fairy legend, but now they sat silently gazing on the waves, with their hands clasped in each others. To Una, Hubert had confided all his secret sorrows; and when his sighs were wafted towards the cloudy distance that veiled with its blue vapours the far-stretching mountains of the Rhine, she well knew whither

those sighs were directed. All was now hushed—the trees gently waved to and fro, as if rocking themselves to sleep; the wild pinks and violets that peeped here and there from among the rocks, had closed their sweet eyes, and no sound was heard but the mountain rills, which seemed to murmur music in their dreams. The trees and shrubs in the foreground glowed with a thousand hues, while the stately forests, which rose in the distance, waved in ruddy gold, and after a while the moon arose from behind a neighbouring summit, like the Genius of Fairy-land itself, and shed a witching light over the scene.

"That is Loreley's voice," suddenly exclaimed Hubert, "yonder she sits and smiles. Didst thou not hear her strain? Seldom does a bird sing thus sweetly beneath the moonlight." Una arose hastily and alarmed, "Come, brother," cried she, "it is time you should conduct me home; and we must not again stay so long and so lonesomely on this precipice, for, indeed, it terrifies me to see you thus." They now returned to the castle; and Una, hand in hand with her brother, and dreading the expected reproof of her mother, entered the hall where her parents were sitting, according to their evening custom. The company were discoursing of Loreley, and of the strange story of her enchantments, which had just reached the castle. Hubert lent an attentive ear to every word that was spoken.

"If she be a witch," said the knight Ruthard, "she ought most certainly to be burned, though she were as beautiful as that bright evening star." Hubert sighed, and leaning fondly over the Count's chair, "Father," cried he, "send me to take her, for I fear her not. If she be a sorceress, I will give her up to you; but if you find no fault in her, and that she has never willingly injured any one, promise to give her me to wife." At this the whole company could scarcely refrain from laughing, and the Palatine replied, "From what we hear of this Loreley, she seems to be a skilful fisher, and spreads her glittering nets so artfully, that she entraps every thing which swims within her reach; you, my son, are a young and innocent little fish, that had better keep out of the way of her snares. Youth is often led by curiosity, and by mere prohibition, to desire things, which, once attained, lose all their charms, and are speedily thrown aside."

"If this unearthly creature be not a sorceress," pursued the chaplain, "she may probably be a mermaid, and with such beings man should seek no fellowship. God has created them for another element, and placed enmity between them and the human race, and we be to him who seeks to pass the bounds which nature herself has prescribed."

"Ay, we have stories enough," pursued Ruthard, "of the ill-fortune of such kind of love adventurers; and, for my part, I do not see what should hinder us from hunting down like a wild beast such a creature as this, who lies in wait, and spreads her snares, to allure man to his destruction."

"That would, I think, be going too far," said the Countess, "for a water sprite, as they say, is a creature devoid of sense, while man is blessed with sufficient reason to prevent him from following the blind impulses of nature."

"And I can tell you, Ruthard, I will never lend

you my bow again," added Hubert, "if you talk in this manner of the lovely Loreley."

The Palatine now put an end to the conversation, and called upon the chaplain for the evening benediction. But Hubert had little rest that night, either waking or dreaming, for he felt almost sure that Loreley would be assailed, and fancied that he saw the arrow transfixing her fair bosom, and her blood streaming like coral down the dusky rock into the dark deep Rhine.

A few days afterwards, a large company of strangers assembled at the castle, and such as were disposed for the chase, were led forth by Hubert and his companions through many a vine-covered valley and beechen glade.

The Palatine had secretly given directions to Ruthard to keep a strict watch over his son, lest curiosity or rashness should induce him to disregard his parental injunctions, and be attracted toward the Syren of the Rock. Notwithstanding this injunction, however, it happened that Hubert was imperceptibly separated from his party; and almost before he was aware, found himself in solitude, and heard the bugle notes that were sounded to recall him, already softened by the distance. His heart beat high with the joy of newly-acquired freedom, like that of the young eagle, as it listens to the retiring wings of the guardians of the nest. He rushed eagerly forward, scarcely knowing whither to direct his course. Sometimes he felt as if urged to accomplish the will of his father, and make Loreley a prisoner; and sometimes it seemed as though he had long known and loved her, and was called upon to hasten to her rescue. He now descended through a deep ravine to the shore, just where the river makes a turn through a solemn wilderness of rocks, overlooked by the lofty turrets of Oberwesel, and the watch-tower of Schonberg. The last rays of expiring day still lingered on their summits, while from behind the mountains glimmered the first pale moonbeams, as on that sweet evening when Hubert had sat with Una on the Kuhlberg.

Suddenly there came wafted over the waters a sound of melody, repeated again and again in one unvarying strain, but so soft and soothing, that he who listened felt as though entranced, and knew not that they were but the same tones which still returned upon his ear.

Hubert looked around and saw nothing, and wondered within himself what bird it could be that sung more sweetly than the nightingale; but there were some young peasants from Oberwesel amusing themselves in a boat near the shore, and he heard them exclaim to one another, "that is Loreley!" he called out to them, and said, "I am the Palatine's son, and would fain take a row by moonlight; approach, therefore, and ferry me over," and he leapt into the boat with his bow and arrow in his hand, and his locks floating in the wind. "Row me to the rock where Loreley sings," cried he—"row away that I may see the beautiful Loreley." The young rowers pulled from the shore, and soon pointed out to him the rock from whence the voice proceeded; and there stood the nymph all dazzling in the moonlight, twining through her golden hair a garland of water flowers and rushes, gathered from the Rhine, and singing unceasingly the same notes, "Loreley, Loreley."

"Take me over, take me over," cried Hubert impatiently, but the rowers told him that a compliance with his wishes might prove fatal to him; and still kept near the shore. "Then let it be my death," said he, "or else let me reach thee, beautiful maiden, never to part from thee more," and again he conjured the young men to proceed, and assured them that he had been sent by his father to take the nymph prisoner, and had come for that purpose, armed with his bow and arrows. At length they agreed to ferry him across, and they ploughed their way through the deep waters; there was hissing and foaming round the oars, and already the mighty rock stretched its broad black shadow across the boat. Once more the rowers paused, and essayed to divert the youth from his purpose. The song had now ceased, and the beautiful Loreley stood at the edge of the water, looking out as if through a mist, with her eyes beaming brightly, and her long hair descending to her feet. The young men urged Hubert to profit by so favourable an opportunity, and take aim at the sorceress; but he seized on his bow

and dashed it from him into the water, calling out, "Fear not, thou sweet one, that aught shall harm thee, for thou shalt be my own true love, and I will be thine."

A sudden apprehension came upon all those who were with him, and dreading lest they might become infatuated, like the Palatine's son, and encounter their death upon this rock, they turned the boat hastily round, and struggled hard to regain the shore. Hubert sprang up, and tried to leap upon the rock, but his efforts were vain, and he sank into the Rhine; and after him, with a soft, melancholy cry, rushed down the syren, and it seemed like the flashing of a silvery ray from the rock into the water. The youths, in dismay, rowed away faster and faster, intent only upon their own safety. "How shall we dare to confess that the Palatine's son has perished upon the spot! And yet, if we tell it not, and keep aloof from his father's wrath, what injurious suspicions will light upon us, whenever it comes to be known. We will tell the truth as it really happened; how he entreated and commanded us to bring him here, and made us believe that our lord, the Count, had sent him to kill the wicked sorceress, and now he was bewitched at the very moment when he ought to have taken aim at her."

When Hubert unclosed his eyes, he felt as if awakening in the middle of winter. Green and blue icicles, of gigantic size, appeared to inclose him on every side, but a soft spring air seemed to play through the clefts, thawing his frozen limbs, and kissing his cold forehead. These icicles, however, were spars and bright crystals, and the soft air was the breath of Loreley, which floated around him like a whispering wave. "Thickets of tall sedge and various water-plants rustled around the cave, and there was a perpetual singing and sighing, as the crystal waves rose and fell in plaintive murmurs."

In the stillness of this deep world, Hubert now found himself alone with the water-fairy. Let us felt not at rest in this mysterious solitude; and with the same impatience which he had manifested in leaping into the flood, he now longed to return to the regions of upper air, and felt that there alone he could gaze with real delight on his lovely Lorey. "Take me where the sun shines, that I may rejoice in thy beauty," cried he, as her waving hair and dazzling arms were twining around him, and she took him by the hand, and led him further into the recesses of the rock. At every step the light became fainter, and the flowers that trembled in the water seemed at an unmeasurable depth below them. "The mountains and valleys are sleeping," said Loreley, "while the eyes of heaven are open. Dost thou not see them looking down upon us? Take care that thou slip not," added she, as Hubert seemed bewildered with the wild rush of the waters; "sit down beside me here, and we will wait for the rising sun."

A tall white cliff glimmered in the faint light, and seemed as if borne along by the impetuous waves which rolled close to Hubert's feet. He could now distinguish, through the still air, dark outlines of rocks and towers. "Where are we?" asked he, almost shrinking from Loreley's embrace; for he sometimes felt as if it were a spirit that sat beside him, and that, perhaps, the next moment he might be plunged into the abyss from which they had emerged. "We are in the middle of the Rhine," replied the nymph, "these are the old mountains, the children of the giants, and at the foot of one of them we are now sitting; though it has stretched its proud head so long out of the water, it is but brittle white stone, and with it I can angle for the ships that sail so merrily up and down the Rhine; for by that rock they sink, and yonder, where I look down the river, the fragments come to light again;" but nothing ever returns from that dark gulf above."

Far across the water now shone a glimmering light—it was a lamp just beginning to burn before one of the altars of St. Clement's church, on the opposite shore; and as the feeble flame slowly illuminated the spot, shedding here and there a flickering ray, Hubert thought he could distinguish the Manse-thurm at a little distance, and several of the well-known towers which crowned the neighbouring heights. "See," said Loreley, who seemed aware

\*There is a saying on the Rhine, that the vessels which sink on the Bingerloch, are thrown up again at the place called Die Bank, near St. Goar.

of his mistrust and alarm, "I have led thee up the river, though the waters would fain have carried thee down; but had they done so, my own fairy people would never have let thee depart out of their crystal courts, and now thou shalt be mine, and mine only. For thy sake have I quitted our beautiful palace—there is no happiness for me without thee."

"Loreley," said Hubert, looking in her face, (and as the light shone out, it smiled as sweetly as ever through the locks that waved in the night wind,) "they say that thou wert wont to rejoice upon thy rock, whenever one of the human race was swallowed by thy own wild waters." And Loreley sighed and answered, "Sweet youth, it may, indeed, be true, for I know no better; I thought it must be a delight to them to sport and love as we do, in cool crystal grottoes, with the waves singing about them." "And they say too," said Hubert, "that thou wouldst sit and sing to allure the sons of men to their destruction."

"I recked not of the sons of men," answered Loreley, somewhat scornfully. "I sang because it amused me, and gazed about me for my own pleasure; I neither called them, nor looked at them, nor thought of them, and often smiled within myself to see how they fancied I was making signs and sporting with them. But now all this is changed, and such pastimes will amuse me no longer. These have I chosen for myself, and thee will I carry down with me to the deep, and follow all over the world."

The ruddy glow of morning now illumined the heights, and the white pinnacles were lighted up like so many beacons in the ray. The fair Loreley was leaning her head on Hubert's bosom, when all at once she started up in alarm, as the crowing of the cock was heard from the shore. "I must away," cried she, "at eventide thou wilt find me again by my accustomed rock. Forget thou not the hour of meeting." Having said this, she threw a pebble into the water, the waves grew troubled and foaming, and a little boat was seen working its way out of their swelling bosom. "Spring into this bark," said Loreley, "and fear nothing—that loose plank will serve for an oar. Fare thee well, Hubert, fare thee well!" With these words she sank into the flood, and Hubert, who had already stepped into the boat, saw her no longer; but below him a soft mournful voice sang "Loreley, Loreley," and it seemed at last as if the melancholy notes were choked by tears.

The dancing bark conveyed Hubert as trustily as though he had been a heedless child, incapable of making any exertion for himself, past the dangerous current to the opposite shore, where the castle of Ehrenfels, looking down on its joyous vineyards, glittered in the morning ray. Beneath the bright sunbeams, Hubert began to shake off the bewildering visions of the night, and as they gradually unravelled themselves before him, he scarce knew what to think, or what course to pursue. Doubt and confidence, tenderness and repugnance, struggled in his bosom, as night and day had lately done before his eyes. Sometimes he fancied he saw the gentle face of Loreley, as it had smiled in the light of that lamp from the altar, and he thought if he could only have brought her into day-light, that all doubt and dread would have been dispelled at once. Then, again, when he remembered how she started in affright at the crowing of the cock, an indefinite feeling of horror arose in his mind, and he felt once more as if it had been a ghost that had accompanied him through the darkness, and only wondered that he had escaped alive from his fearful adventure. Wearied with idle conjectures, he hastened to the hut of a neighbouring vine-dresser, and craving a morning's repast, took off his wet garments, and clothed himself in those of one of the young peasants.

What course to adopt he found it difficult to determine. At first he was tempted to return forthwith to Stahleck, in the hope, that since his life had been so wonderfully preserved, the anger occasioned to his family, by his disobedience, might be appeased, and his mother and sister might, perhaps, be persuaded to join their entreaties with his, in behalf of the beautiful Loreley. Then, if a tender yearning would arise in his bosom, to fly once more to the nymph of the rock, and live for her, and her alone, an involuntary shudder would again overtake him, and his love would be changed into a vague feeling of horror and repugnance.

After thus dreaming away a great part of the morning upon the shore, he at length came to the determination of proceeding to Stahleck, without further delay; to avert, if possible, any evil which might be impending over the fairy maiden.

His heart grew heavier at every step which brought him nearer to his father's castle. He ascended a staircase hewn out of the rock, which led, by a shorter passage, to a side portal; and, as he lifted the hammer to announce his approach, he perceived, for the first time, that the ring from his left hand was missing; and it instantly occurred to him, that the nymph must have secretly withdrawn it from his finger, and retained it as an irrevocable pledge of betrothment.

It was already evening—the Palatine, informed of the death of his son, had sent forth Ruthard, with a numerous troop of followers, to carry off Loreley, living or dead. As these fierce intruders approached, the maiden stood on her rock, gazing up the stream towards Hubert's castle, and warbling her wonted notes of "Loreley, Loreley." As soon as they arrived opposite the rock, Ruthard called out, in a deceitful tone, "We bring thee a greeting from thy true love Hubert—he sends thee a bridal kiss, which will make thee his wife. Come down, then, and receive it, or tell us how we may reach thee in safety." Loreley raised her white hand, and with her delicate finger pointed out a path by which they might climb the rock, and here and there a shrub which would assist them in their ascent; for she believed that they were bringing her a greeting from Hubert. Several of his companions tried to dissuade the daring Ruthard from this perilous attempt; but he laughed at their fears, and selected two of the most determined of his followers, to clamber with him up the cliff. "Now take your cords, and bind her," cried he, when they had reached the summit. "Alas! what would you?" exclaimed Loreley. "Thou sorceress!" answered Ruthard, "know that I am come to avenge the death of the fair young Hubert." "Hubert, Hubert, come hither," cried Loreley, in a plaintive voice across the mountain. "Alas! I am no sorceress—I am Hubert's own betrothed." "Spirit of evil," answered Ruthard, "thou knowest that Hubert lies low beneath the Rhine." But Loreley protested again and again that Hubert was safe at Stahleck, and wringing her snowy hands, and embracing Ruthard's knees, exclaimed unceasingly, in a piteous tone of voice, "Oh! let me not die, Hubert, Hubert, forsake me not in this extremity."

Her grief and beauty softened the hearts of all those who had remained below; and one of them called out to the knight, "Prithee spare her a while, and I will gallop back to Stahleck, and see if what she says be true. If the young Count be really at the castle, and she has been the means of saving his life, she has surely a claim to be set at liberty."

But Ruthard laughed him to scorn, and rejoined, "Wilt thou not bring a priest with thee also, and try to convert the evil one? Even if Hubert were yet alive, this Loreley would still be deserving of death, if only for having led him astray from his duty." Loreley, however, seemed inspired with fresh courage, as she gazed after her champion, who was already scouring away on his foaming steed. After a brief space he returned, bringing with him the news of Hubert's safety, but added, addressing Loreley, "Thou must give back the ring that thou tookest from the Palatine's son, or thy life will not even yet be spared. Our lord the Count, however, promises thee his protection on this condition."

"I have no ring, no ring," answered Loreley, in a piteous accent—"he had none on his hand to give me—Ah! Hubert, Hubert, why comest thou not to save me. Carry me to him in these bonds, and he will unloose them." "Dost thou see now," cried Ruthard, "she will not give up the ring." And Loreley wept like the pleading roe, when the cruel huntsman stands over it, and called on Hubert again and again, and maintained unceasingly that she knew nothing of the ring. It was then that some of the rugged men who stood below were melted into compassion for her, for Ruthard declared he would allow no further delay. A huge fragment of the rock was hung round her tender neck, and the fierce executioners were about to commence their sacrifice. Loreley looked on them, and exclaimed, "My lover has betrayed me; none shall lay hands upon

me;" and once more gazing up the river, and leaning forward, as though to descry the castle of Stahleck, she rushed to the edge of the rock and plunged into the water. Ruthard and his murderous assistants stood as if metamorphosed into stone. Loreley was avenged. They were unable to find the path down the rock, and perished miserably on its summit.

The next day, a man from Oberwesel carried to the castle a large draught of fish, which he had netted in the Rhine; and as they were preparing for the table, within one of them was found the young Count's ring, which must have slipped from his finger as he sunk into the river.

Hubert, whom his father had at first detained prisoner, could be withheld no longer, when he heard the fate of Loreley: but in vain did he traverse the Rhine from side to side: the fair form and gentle face of the maiden never more met his eyes. She was never seen again. Her voice, however, might still at times be heard—no longer singing as before, but softly answering those who spoke to her; and the tones were half choked by tears and sighs, and became lower and lower at every word; it seemed as if she were saying, "Why do you waste your breath on me, and invite me to sport as I was wont to do! Thine is not Hubert's voice—I have lost him, lost him for ever."

One day Hubert himself called to her, and she answered him, and gave him back his own greeting; but the tones were more than he could bear, and he turned to hide his face on the bosom of his sister Una, who stood mournfully beside him. Then, from his outstretched hand, he dropped the ring into the water, and sat listening anxiously between the strokes of the oars; and they were fain to row him away in his anguish; for if his sister had not restrained him, he would most assuredly have plunged into the Rhine.

From the time of his dropping the ring upon the rock, (which to this day bears the name of the Water Fairy,) Hubert began to pine, as if something were preying on his heart; and, with a yearning grief for Loreley, his young life melted away, like the faint tones of the hunter's horn dying in the distance.